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Upper Yellowstone River Special Area Management Plan Environmental Assessment released

Omaha, Neb. – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Omaha District has finalized and released an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Upper Yellowstone River Special Area Management Plan (SAMP).

Omaha District Commander, Colonel Robert Ruch signed a “Finding of No Significant Impact” on April 12, 2011, which completes the EA and SAMP process. The EA identifies an updated, more restrictive alternative for processing permits within the 86-mile reach of the upper Yellowstone River in Park County, Mont.

The implementation of the SAMP will streamline the Department of the Army permit process while making the permitting process more predictable for the public. Recognizing that a moratorium on all permitting is not a prudent course of action to pursue, this solution allows the Corps to focus its efforts on projects that could adversely affect the upper Yellowstone River. Many projects proposed in waters of the United States benefit the public, sometimes improving conditions for the environment as well as for society, while other projects may have a neutral effect.

The SAMP was mandated to address the cumulative effects of anthropogenic bank stabilization and flood confinement on the upper Yellowstone River in Park County, Mont. The Corps believes that this preferred alternative will result in an improved regulatory climate for the upper Yellowstone River.

Within the 86-mile designated area, an area of enhanced protection within a Special River Management Zone (SRMZ) will be established. The SRMZ is a 48-mile sub-reach of the upper Yellowstone River that is the most susceptible to forced morphology. Some of the channel segments within the SRMZ already have forced morphology, but much of the corridor remains fully functional. Where practicable, permit conditions and compensatory mitigation will ensure no net loss of aquatic function or services. Adverse cumulative impacts will be minimized or avoided under the SAMP. The approximate geographic limits of the SRMZ are from just upstream of the community of Emigrant downstream to a few miles below the Shields River and Mission Creek confluences with the Yellowstone River, and lateral limits of the SRMZ are based on the geomorphic limits of the floodplain.

Some Nationwide Permits (NWP) will be revoked and new SAMP-specific Regional Conditions will be developed for those NWP not revoked. Restrictions will be placed on the configuration of all permitted projects. Projects unable to meet the revised SAMP-specific NWP requirements will be evaluated under standard (individual) permit procedures. Proposed work would be evaluated in a watershed, floodplain, and valley context, and a compensatory mitigation program will be implemented to offset adverse impacts.

The report can be found on the Montana Regulatory Office’s website,

<http://www.nwo.usace.army.mil/html/od-rmt/mthome.htm>

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